DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 049 859 RC 005 192

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TITLE	A Comparison of Teenage Boys' and Girls' Orientations Towards Marriage and Procreation.
INSTITUTION	Texas A and M Univ., College Station. Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	3 Feb 71
NOTE	26p.; Paper presented at annual meetings of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, Jacksonville, February 1-3, 1971
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents, *Attitudes, Caucasian Students, *Cross Cultural Studies, *Family (Sociological Unit), Goal Orientation, *Marriage, Negro Youth, *Rural Youth, Work Attitudes, Work Life Expectancy

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the orientations of boys and girls towards marriage and procreation, a neglected area of sociological study, and to ascertain the manner in which the sexes may differ in these orientations. Reported are findings from a survey of Negro and white high school seniors and their dropout age peers residing in economically depressed areas of rural East Texas. Although the youth evinced a general desire to marry in their early twenties, Negro and white girls desired to marry earlier than their male counterparts. Regardless of sex or race, the overwhelming majority of youth desired and expected from 2 to 4 children. The white boys evidenced slightly lower desires for children than the white girls. Except for the Negro girls, the boys and girls preferred their spouses or themselves, respectively, not to work outside the home after children. However, regardless of race, girls were considerably more inclined towards working outside the home, at least until children, than the boys were towards their wife working. The central tendency in every sex-race grouping, except the Negro males, was to rank "desire to marry and raise a family" moderately relative to other goals. The Negro boys tended to rank these goals low. (Author)

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A COMPARISON OF TEENAGE BOYS' AND GIRLS' ORIENTATIONS TOWARDS MARRIAGE AND PROCREATION

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Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, Jacksonville, February 1-3, 1971. The research reported here was supported by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station as a contribution to TAES research project H-2611 and USDA (CSRS) project S-61, "Human Resource Development and Mobility in the Rural South."

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the orientations of boys and girls towards marriage and procreation, a neglected area of sociological study, and to ascertain the manner in which the sexes may differ in these orientations.

Reported are findings from a survey of Negro and white high school seniors and their dropout age peers residing in economically depressed areas of rural East Texas. Although the youth evinced a general desire to marry in their early twenties, Negro girls and white girls desired to marry earlier than their male counterparts. Regardless of sex or race, the overwhelming majority of youth desired and expected from two to four children. The white boys evidenced slightly lower desires for children than the white girls. Except for the Negro girls, the boys and girls preferred their spouse or themself, respectively, not to work outside the home after children. However, regardless of race, girls were considerably more inclined towards working outside the home, at least until children, than the boys were towards their wife working. The central tendency in every sex-race grouping, except the Negro males, was to rank desire to marry and raise a family moderately relative to other goals. The Negro boys tended to rank these goals low. (Author)

INTRODUCTION

Youth's projections towards marriage and families of procreation have received little attention in sociological research. This has been true despite the import of marital-family statuses and roles in the lives of almost all adults, male and female. Boys' orientations towards these statuses and roles have especially been neglected. Yet, at least one study has shown that marriage and raising a family is one of boys', as well as girls', greatest concerns about the future (Garrison, 1966). Projections in regard to marital-family statuses and roles may constitute a salient element in boys' and girls' "frames of aspirational reference" (i.e., the set of goals an individual holds as a guide to future-oriented behavior).

In considering the implications of youth's orientations, it is especially important that the orientations of both the sexes be analyzed. A peculiar characteristic of marital-family orientation is that, for the most part, their actualization is dependent upon agreement between persons of opposite sex or acquiescence of one sex to the desires of the other. Different orientations of two marital partners may explain the discrepancy between actual and desired or anticipated behavior of one of them. Furthermore, the resulting disappointment or frustration felt by the partner

unable to realize his desires may have unfavorable implications for his psychological well-being and may have social repercussions, such as conflict in the marital relationship.

The objective of this study is to investigate the marital-family orientations of both boys and girls and to ascertain the manner in which boys and girls may differ, if at all, in these orientations. The study focuses on: (1) desired age of marriage, (2) number of children desired and expected, (3) desire and expectation of boys and girls for their wife or themself, respectively, to work outside the home after marriage and after children, and (4) the rank of importance these youth accord desire for marriage and a family of procreation relative to other goals.

All of the projections to be investigated in this study may be significant elements in youth's frame of aspirational reference and, thus, critical to the understanding of status-attainment processes. Evidence of general sex differences in regard to at least three of these orientations, fertility projections and desires and expectations for the wife or mother in the family of procreation to work outside of the home, would suggest the probability of role conflict between marital partners; and thus, the probability that the aspirations of one partner will not be realized.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study incorporates the conceptual distinction between aspirations and expectations (Kuvlesky, 1966). Youth's aspirations,

desires, or wants in regard to marriage and procreation may differ significantly from what they actually anticipate. It has not been determined whether aspirations or expectations are more prominent in a youth's frame of reference. It is likely that both influence actual behavior. Rank of importance of marital-family goals has significance as a measure of the salience of such goals in youth's frame of aspirational reference, thereby suggesting the extent to which these goals may be given priority over others.

RELEVANT PAST RESEARCH

Because of the dearth of research in this area, extant data offers little basis for predicting sex differences or similarities in many marital-family orientations. Theoretically, however, there is reason to expect boys and girls to differ in regard to most of the projections to be investigated in this study.

One may expect girls to desire to marry earlier than boys, because of the differential salience other adult statuses, particularly career, will have in the lives of men and women. A career is often as important to a boy's future as marriage and a family of procreation. Therefore, it is likely that a boy will be preoccupied with attaining an occupational identity before engaging in a marital relationship. Findings of previous studies substantiate this argument. It was found in a national survey (Franklin and Remmers, 1960) and in two studies in the South (Drabick, 1965; Garrison, 1966) that high school girls desired and expected to marry at an earlier age than their male peers.

In regard to fertility projections and orientations towards employment of females outside the home, girls may have more reason to forsake traditional norms than boys. However, for Negro and white youth, the reasons may be quite different, especially in regard to fertility desires. The Negro female has had to carry the burden of the large family considerably more than the male in Negro society. Rejecting the idea of large families and pursuing high-level career goals may be part of the process of dissociating herself from her former oppressive status (Antonvsky, 1967). On the other hand, the Negro male may still hold to the idea of "machismo" (Liebow, 1967), i.e., that ability to produce a large family demonstrates proof of masculinity. In contrast to Negroes, white girls face the dilemma created by ambiguous and inconsistent cultural expectations (Douvan and Adelson, 1966). The American educational process has encouraged the development of their talents and skills. Yet to utilize such talents and skills, the girls must give up, to some extent, the traditional role associated with being a wife and mother. This may mean smaller families and employment outside of the home.

No studies were found which investigated sex differences in regard to Negroes' fertility aspirations. However, a study of high school sophomores in South Carolina revealed that Negro males expected significantly more children than Negro females (Knapp and Boyd, 1970). On the other hand, extant evidence indicates little difference between number of children desired

and expected by white boys and girls. Between two and four children appears to be the norm internalized by most white youth regardless of sex (Garrison, 1966).

No study was found in which either Negro or white boys and girls were questioned directly regarding their projections for their spouse or themself, respectively, to work outside the home after marriage and/or after children. A Georgia study reports that 88 percent of the boys surveyed stated "housewife" as the desired occupation for their wife (Garrison, 1966). In contrast, research repeatedly demonstrates that girls seldom indicate housewife or homemaker as their preferred occupation (Flanagan, et al., 1964; Slocum and Empey, 1957; Stratton, 1957). Yet these studies did not investigate the conditions under which the girls intended to pursue their desired occupations. That is, whether or not they looked forward to a career after marriage and/or after children. In some studies, large proportions of the girls sampled have evinced a desire to combine homemaker and career roles (Slocum and Empey, 1957; Turner, 1964; Kosa, et al., 1967).

In regard to the relative importance of marital-family goals, boys' preoccupation with attaining an occupational identity suggests that they would not give marital and family goals priority over occupational and educational goals during late adolescence. Conversely, it is at this age that one would expect females to begin to orient themselves toward their future mate and family. There appears to have been no previous investigation of sex differences in this regard. Slocum reports that marriage and the future role

of homemaker were more attractive to a sample of female high school seniors than a career. The majority of the girls believed that women's most important duty to society is to marry and have a family (Slocum and Empey, 1957).

METHODS

The data utilized in this study were collected in 1968 from high school seniors and their age peers who were either high school dropouts or academically retarded.[1] The youth had resided in economically depressed counties of rural East Texas[2] two years previously, and the great majority were still residing in these counties at the time of the 1968 interviews. Because ethnicity and marital status are likely to be factors influencing marital-family orientations, Mexican-American and married boys and girls were excluded from the sample.

Although the social background of the males and females of the sample were similar, there were significant differences between the Negro and white youth. Generally, the Negroes came from families of lower socio-economic status, their parents had less education, their mother was more likely to have been employed outside the home, and their families tended to be larger. Because

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[1] The research reported in this study was conducted as the second follow-up in a panel study of youths' status projections. The respondents were originally contacted in 1966.

[2] The 1960 U.S. Census reports the median family incomes in the counties ranged from $1,737 to $2,451 and classifies the counties as 100 percent rural.

of these differences as well as the fact that the marital-family orientations of the Negro and white girls in the sample were found to differ significantly in 1966 (Kuvlesky and Obordo, 1969), race was controlled throughout the analysis.

In regard to the low-income nature of the sample area, it should be noted that preferred, as well as actual, age of marriage and size of family have been found to vary inversely and positively, respectively, by socio-economic status (Westhof, et al., 1961; Drabick, 1965; Gustavus, et al., 1969; Franklin and Remmers, 1961). In addition, persons of rural residence tend to marry earlier and to have larger families than persons residing in urban areas (Moss, 1965; Larsen and Rogers, 1964). Furthermore, evidence also suggests that rural residents in the South have larger family ideals (Freedman and Sharp, 1954).

The majority of the youth were administered questionnaires in school in a group setting. Most of the remainder were given a personal interview and the few who could not be questioned in either manner were mailed questionnaires. Data are not available from the youth who had to be contacted by mailout questionnaires about their orientation toward the female spouse working outside the home. Most of these youth were high school dropouts, a factor which may have influenced these projections.

FINDINGS

Desired Age of Marriage

Desired age of marriage was obtained from an open-ended question which requested the respondent to state the age at which he or she would "like to get married." Regardless of race, girls expressed a desire to marry earlier than boys, Figures 1 and 2. But the differences between the white boys and girls were not as marked as the differences between the Negroes. Both white boys and girls preferred to marry in their early twenties, as did Negro girls. However, twenty-five was a conspicuously popular age with the Negro boys.

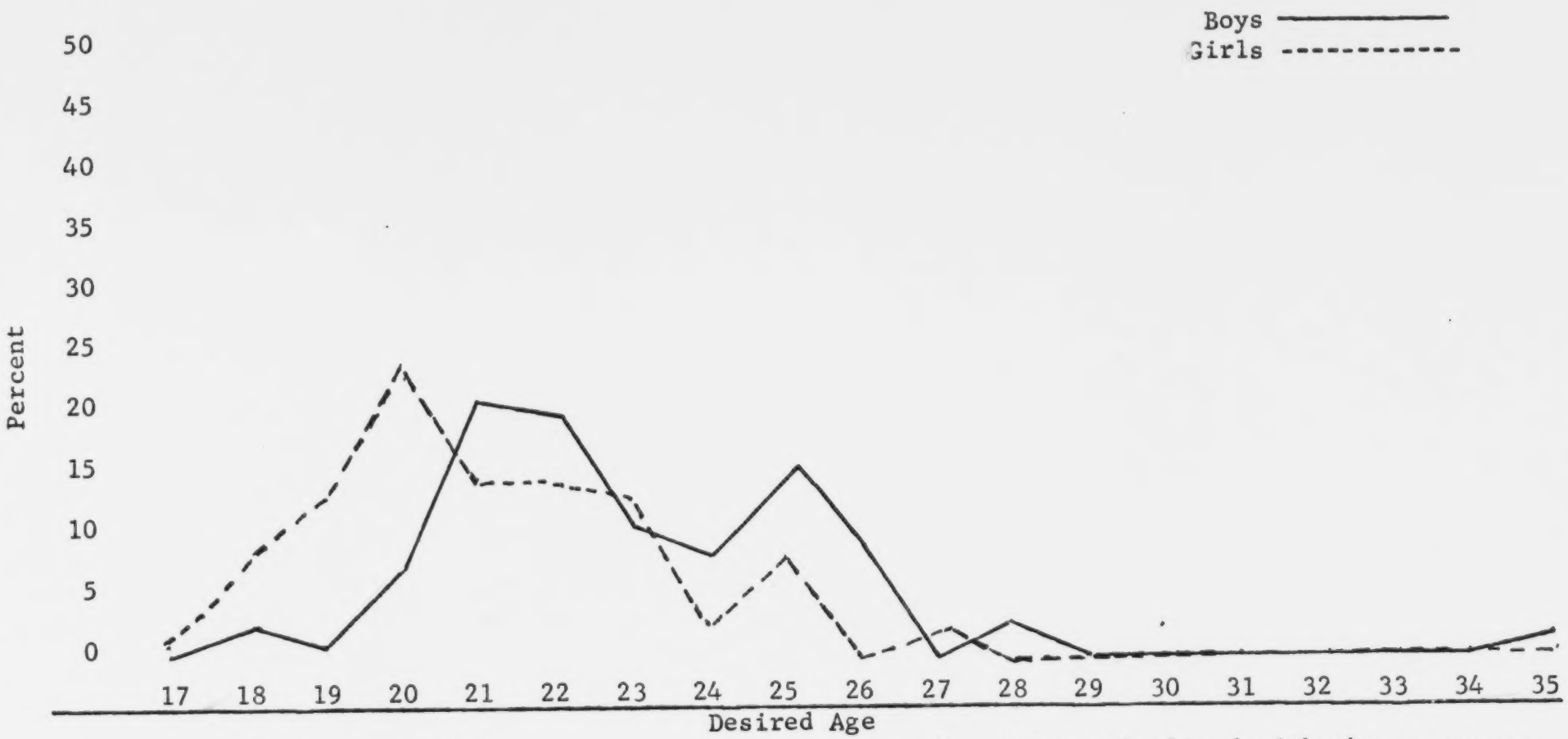
Number of Children Desired and Expected

To obtain fertility projections, the respondents were asked how many children they wanted and how many they expected to have. Structured alternative responses ranged from "none" to "8 or more."

The responses of the boys and girls, regardless of race, were similar in that the overwhelming majority of both sexes expressed desires and expectations for two to four children. The mean number desired and expected was approximately three (Tables 1 and 2). However, white boys exhibited more of a preference for only two children than white girls. On the other hand, a substantially greater proportion of white girls than white boys expressed a desire for four children.

The fertility expectations of the white boys were also smaller than those of the white girls, but the differences between the

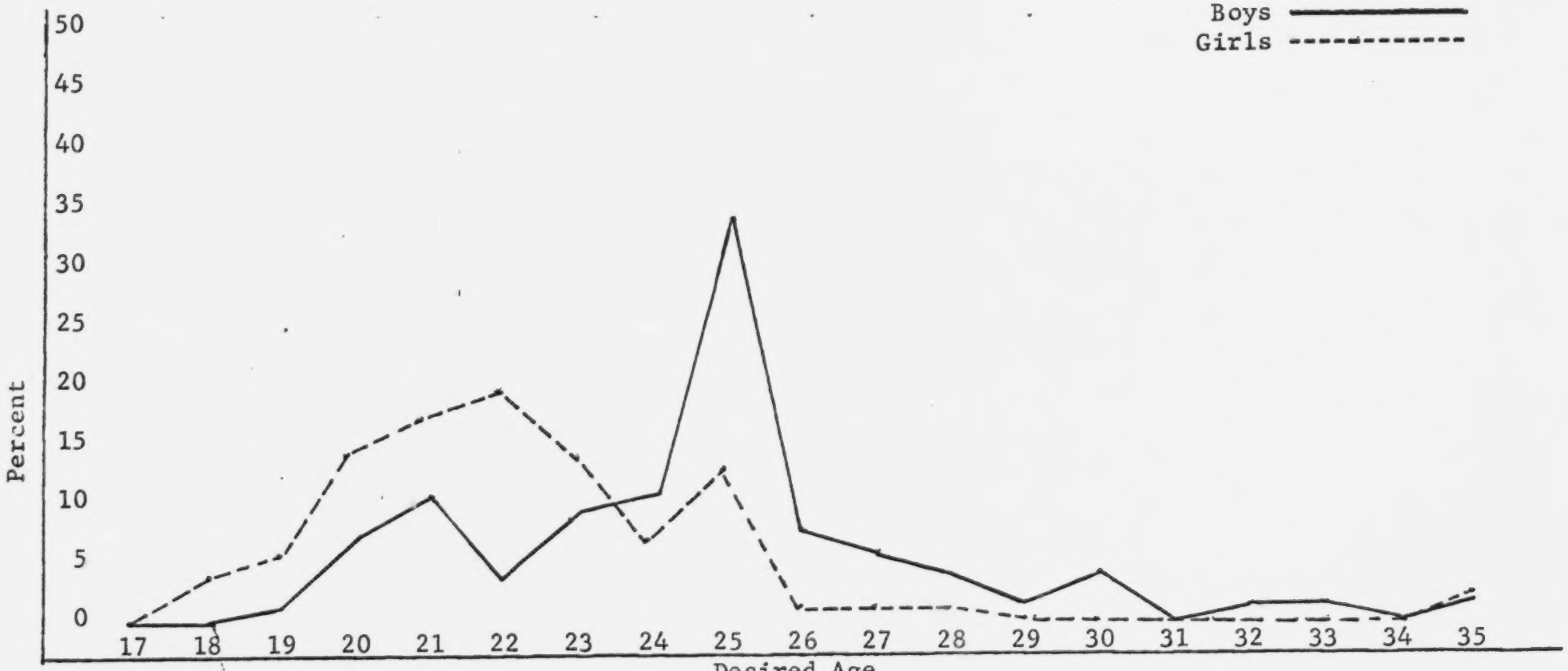
Figure 1. Age of Marriage Desired by White Boys and Girls



	Boys	Girls
Mean	23.16	21.22
Median	22	21

Chi square calculated with the responses grouped into 4 categories -- 20 or less, 21-22, 23-24, and 25 or more -- were significant at the .001 level of probability.

Figure 2. Age of Marriage Desired by Negro Boys and Girls



	Boys	Girls
Mean	24.68	22.26
Median	25	22

Chi square calculated with the responses grouped into 4 categories -- 20 or less, 21-22, 23-24, and 25 or more -- were significant at the .001 level of probability.

Table 1. Number of Children Desired by White and Negro Boys and Girls.

Number of Children	Whites		Negroes	
	Boys (N=104)	Girls (N=88)	Boys (N=79)	Girls (N=77)
	Percent			
0	1	3	0	1
1	2	0	3	4
2	41	27	34	43
3	36	31	20	17
4	17	30	33	30
5 or more	3	9	10	5
Total	100	100	100	100
No information	0	0	5	0
Mean	2.75	3.15	3.19	2.90
Median	2	3	3	3

*Whites: $x^2 = 8.96$ df = 3 $.02 < P < .05$

*Negroes: $x^2 = 2.77$ df = 3 $.30 < P < .50$

*Categories 0 - 2 were combined in calculation of chi square.

Table 2. Number of Children Expected by White and Negro Boys and Girls.

Number of Children	Whites		Negroes	
	Boys (N=99)	Girls (N=87)	Boys (N=76)	Girls (N=76)
	Percent			
0	2	1	0	3
1	4	1	3	5
2	42	30	28	38
3	27	35	25	17
4	19	23	33	22
5 or more	6	10	11	15
Total	100	100	100	100
No information	5	1	8	1
Mean	2.79	3.14	3.39	3.04
Median	3	3	3	3

*Whites: $x^2 = 4.84$ df = 3 $.05 < P < .10$

*Negroes: $x^2 = 5.33$ df = 3 $.05 < P < .10$

*Categories 0 - 2 were combined in calculation of chi square.

sexes were not great enough to be deemed statistically significant. Negro boys and girls did not differ significantly in either their aspirations or expectations regarding the size of their future families of procreation.

Desires and Expectations Regarding Work of Wife or Self Outside the Home

Girls and boys were requested to choose one of the following alternatives in answer to questions regarding their desires and expectations for themself or their spouse, respectively, to work outside the home:

1. Not work outside the home at all
2. Work part-time until I (we) have a child
3. Work full-time until I (we) have a child
4. Work part-time even after I (we) have children
5. Work full-time even after I (we) have children

For both Negro and white youth, desires of boys were less favorable towards their wife working than desires of girls were to work after marriage (Table 3). Differences were especially marked between white boys and girls. Over half of the boys did not want their wife to work at all. Most of the remainder preferred that their wife work only part-time until a child arrived. In contrast, a large majority of the white girls desired to work until they had a child; most, full-time. White boys and girls were similar in that neither desired their spouse or themself, respectively, to work outside the home after children. While Negro boys were more inclined toward their wife working after marriage than white boys, they restricted their preferences to before the arrival of children in the family.

Table 3. Boys' and Girls' Desire for Spouse or Self, respectively, to Work Outside the Home after Marriage.

Conditions for Working	White		Negroes	
	Boys (N=97)	Girls (N=83)	Boys (N=77)	Girls (N=72)
	Percent			
Not at all	54	17	26	11
Part-time until child	29	14.	36	20
Full-time until child	13	59	23	26
Part-time after child	4	4	11	23
Full-time after child	0	6	4	15
Total	100	100	100	100
No information	7	5	7	5
*Whites:	$x^2 = 49.64$	df = 4	P <.001	
Negroes:	$x^2 = 19.40$	df = 4	P< .001	

*The last two categories were combined in calculation of chi square.

Table 4. Boys' and Girls' Expectation for Spouse or Self, respectively, to Work Outside the Home after Marriage.

Conditions for Working	Whites		Negroes	
	Boys (N=96)	Girls (N=83)	Boys (N=76)	Girls (N=69)
	Percent			
Not at all	40	11	19	22
Part-time until child	37	19	42	24
Full-time until child	15	42	17	16
Part-time after child	8	19	18	25
Full-time after child	0	9	4	13
Total	100	100	100	100
No information	8	5	8	8
Whites:	$x^2 = 43.54$	df = 4	P <.001	
Negroes:	$x^2 = 7.76$	df = 4	.10 <P< .20	

In contrast, a substantial proportion of Negro girls desired to work even after children -- although primarily only part-time.

With the exception of the Negro girls, slightly more of the boys and girls expected than desired their wife or themself, respectively, to work outside the home after marriage (Table 4). But the same trends appeared in expectations as aspirations. However, the differences between the expectations of the Negro boys and girls were less and not statistically significant.

Importance of Marital-Family Goals

To elicit relative importance of marital-family goals, the youth were asked to rank their desire "to get married and raise a family" and six other goals -- occupational, educational, leisure-time, money, place of residence, and material possessions -- by the order of importance these goals were to them. To simplify analysis of the results, the responses were grouped into three categories: high (rank of 1 and 2); moderate (rank of 3 to 5); low (rank of 6 and 7).

There was little difference in the ranking of marital-family goals by white boys and girls (Table 5). The central tendency was to rank them moderately. White girls were more likely than white boys to rank family goals high; however, general sex differences between the white youth were not statistically significant. An interesting result is that the ranking of marital-family goals by white youth was quite variable, regardless of sex. A substantial proportion of the white girls, like the boys,

Table 5. Rank of Importance Accorded Marital-Family Goals by White and Negro Boys and Girls

Rank	Whites		Negroes	
	Boys (N=97)	Girls (N=78)	Boys (N=78)	Girls (N=73)
	----------Percent----------			
High (1-2)	28	41	5	14
Moderate (3-5)	45	30	24	38
Low (6-7)	27	29	71	48
Total	100	100	100	100
No information	7	10	6	4
Mean	3.9	3.6	5.6	4.9
Median	4	3	6	5

Whites: $x^2 = 4.36$ df = 2 $.10 < P < .20$

Negroes: $x^2 = 8.58$ df = 2 $.01 < P < .02$

ranked the goals low.

The distributions of both Negro boys and girls are skewed towards the low ranks of 6 and 7. This was especially true for the boys. The central tendency for the Negro girls was to rank the goals moderately; for the boys, slightly lower. Negro boys and girls were similar in that few of either ranked family goals high.

Summary of Findings

The youth in every grouping were similar in that:

1. With the exception of the Negro boys, they tended to want to marry in their early twenties;

2. They desired and expected from 2 to 4 children; mean numbers desired and expected approximated 3;

3. With the exception of the Negro girls, very few of the boys and girls evinced a desire for themself or their spouse, respectively, to work outside the home after having a child;

4. With the exception of the Negro boys, the central tendency was to rank desire to marry and raise a family moderately relative to the other goals.

However, there were significant differences between the sexes in some of the orientations, as shown in Table 6.

1. Girls desired to marry earlier than boys, regardless of race. The differences were especially marked between Negro boys and girls.

2. White boys were more likely to desire 2 children, whereas white girls were more inclined towards 3 or 4.

3. Regardless of race, desires of girls were more favorable towards working outside the home after marriage than desires of white boys towards their wife working. Differences between the aspirations and expectations of the white boys and girls occurred in regard to working until children arrived. Differences between the Negro youth were more conspicuous regarding work after children.

Table 6. Summary of Sex Differences

Orientation	Significant at .05 Level		Nature of differences	
	White	Negro	White	Negro
Desired Age of Marriage	Yes	Yes	G>B	G>B
Number of Children Desired	Yes	No	G>B	
Number of Children Expected	No	No		
Desire re. Employment of Spouse/Self	Yes	Yes	G>B	G>B
Expectation re. Employment of Spouse/Self	Yes	No	G>B	
Rank Importance of Marital-Family Goals	No	Yes		G>B

4. Marital-family goals appeared of less importance to Negro boys than to Negro girls.

As is evident from Table 6 and the preceding discussion, race was a significant factor affecting sex differences in almost all of the orientations. Although it is not the focus of this study, interesting racial differences per se are also apparent. Negro boys and girls desired to marry later and ranked marital-family goals lower than their white counterparts; Negro girls desired and expected fewer children than white girls, whereas the converse was found for the boys; proportionately more Negro than white girls desired to work outside the home after children.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Despite the desires of most of the youth to marry within several years and the fact that almost all of the youth desired and expected children at some point in their lives, these goals did not appear particularly salient in either boys' or girls' frames of aspirational reference. Therefore, the behavior of the youth appears less likely to be oriented towards the attainment of these goals as it is towards the achievement of others, such as occupational and educational goals.

This is understandable for boys, because of the import preparing for and establishing a career has at this time in their lives. Perhaps the later age of marriage desired by Negro boys reflects an especial preoccupation with and perceived need for commitment solely

to educational and career goals. The desire to marry later may also account for the markedly low rank of importance marital-family goals held for these youth. The persistence of this lack of concern over time would, perhaps, reflect the historical lack of responsibility Negro males have assumed in the Negro family.

For girls, at least the whites, the lack of salience of marital-family goals points to the incongruence between girls' socialization and society's actual expectations regarding their adult statuses and roles. For the most part, the girls appear cognizant of and willing to ascribe to societys' prescriptions in this respect. But they appear absorbed in the immediate future. As Douvan and Adelson (1966) propose, "They displace their energy from the central issue of marriage to more immediate but secondary interests." Even in late adolescence, only a few years before they desire to marry, they appear to pursue egoistic goals, such as a career -- goals that may be irrelevant to their eventual status attainment. The immediate concern of Negro girls with other goals is more understandable, if such goals enable them to cope with present and perhaps anticipated economic hardship.

Girls' aspirations and expectations for children and their orientations towards work suggest they do ascribe to the societal prescription that the status of motherhood take precedence over the egoistic status, career. However, most neither desired nor anticipated giving the status of wife such lofty treatment, despite

the desires of the boys. Most desired and planned to combine marital and career roles at least until children arrived.

These orientations appear, therefore, a potential source of marital conflict and, if the girls are not allowed to achieve their goals, a source of disappointment and frustration. If girls do achieve their desires, we may predict greater participation of rural, white women in the Southern labor force. This may lead to possible improvement of the economic status of the white Southern rural families and, perhaps, change in the traditional allocation of roles in these families. Conversely, if the Negro girls acquiesce to the desires of the Negro boys, there may be less participation of rural Negro females in the Southern labor force and perhaps fewer matriarchal, rural Negro families.

Observed sex differences in regard to fertility desires and expectations may not be great enough to result in marital conflict. All of the youth, regardless of sex, were oriented toward small families. Projected family size was small in the sense that it is not as likely to be as much of an economic burden as the typically large low-income families, especially Negro families, in the rural South. It's interesting that youth's projected families of procreation were much smaller than their families of orientation, especially the Negroes'. This suggests that the Negro female is, indeed, in the process of dissociating herself from her former oppressive status. Furthermore, the Negro male no longer appears to be influenced by the idea of machismo. These orientations towards smaller families also have favorable implications

in regard to the population crisis. Nevertheless, the large proportion of youth (the majority of every race-sex grouping) desiring over two children suggests the problem of over-population is far from being solved.

The study of marital-family orientations has particular significance, because it relates, as just suggested, to some of the most critical of national and world problems: the crisis of over-population, participation of women in the labor market and its implications for the future of the American family, and the interminable, plaguing problem of poverty. With improved contraceptive techniques, higher education of women, and lessening demands for women to remain solely in the home, motivation and normative orientations will play an increasingly significant part in determining behavior relating to these problems. Normative orientations regarding marriage, family size, and the allocation of statuses and roles in the family appear to be internalized by late childhood or early adolescence (Gustavus, et al., 1969). The nature of the normative orientations of today's youth and their implications for societal change is certainly worthy of additional sociological study.

Racial differences in marital-family orientations, which were briefly eluded to in this paper, suggest another fruitful area of analysis. The study of ethnic differentials, which has been especially neglected in past research, promises to also be informative. Of course, there are many factors which past research and common sense suggest are related to marital-family orientations.

Knowledge of the nature and extent of their relationship, the process of development of these orientations and their relationship to actual status attainment, factors prohibiting their attainment, and the consequences of failure to realize these goals are all significant problems for future research.

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